

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
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INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 6109

BRUSSELS FOR USEEC

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: ELAB, PINS, IS
SUBJECT: BENJAMIN SELLA, NEW ISRAELI LABOR ATTACHE TO WASHINGTON

1. BENJAMIN SELLA, ACCOMPANIED BY HIS WIFE CHAYA SELLA, WILL BE LEAVING FOR WASHINGTON AUGUST 22. MR. SELLA (AGE 58) WAS BORN IN TORONTO, CANADA, BUT WAS RAISED AND EDUCATED IN U.S. AND SERVED IN U.S. AIR FORCE DURING WORLD WAR II. IN RECENT YEARS HE HAD BEEN RESPONSIBLE FOR NORTH AMERICAN AFFAIRS IN THE HISTADRUT INTERNATIONAL DEPARTMENT. HIS PREVIOUS DIPLOMATIC ASSIGNMENTS INCLUDED A TOUR AS LABOR ATTACHE IN TOKYO FROM 1965-1967. HE ALSO SERVED AS HISTADRUT REPRESENTATIVE IN GHANA IN 1960 AND AS ASIAN REPRESENTATIVE OF THE INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT FOR VOLUNTEER SERVICES IN MANILA FROM 1970 TO 1973.

2. ALTHOUGH BEN SELLA HAD BEEN DESIGNATED LABOR ATTACHE IN NOVEMBER 1976, HE EXPERIENCED SEVERAL LAST MINUTE SNAGS IN HAVING HIS APPOINTMENT CONFIRMED. THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS HAD FIRST INSISTED THAT HIS RANK AND PAY BE DOWNSCALED; THEN OBJECTIONS
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WERE RAISED BECAUSE THE FINANCE MINISTER HAD PROCLAIMED A FREEZE ON CIVIL SERVICE HIRING AND THAT THEREFORE THE POST SHOULD BE LEFT VACANT. AT THE LAST MOMENT THE FOREIGN MINISTRY SELECTION BOARD RAISED THE QUESTION WHETHER, IN VIEW OF THE FACT THAT HISTADRUT REMAINED UNDER LABOR PARTY CONTROL AND THE GOVERNMENT WAS NOW UNDER LIKUD CONTROL, THE

HAISTAIRUT SHOULD CONTINUE TO BE RELIED UPON TO SELECT LABOR ATTACHES. THE DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE MINISTRY OF LABOR ALSO WANTED TO SELECT A CANDIDATE OF HIS OWN AND OBJECTED THAT HE HAD NOT BEEN CONSULTED ABOUT SELLA'S APPOINTMENT. ONLY AFTER PROTRACTED NEGOTIATIONS WAS THE APPOINTMENT CONFIRMED.

3. MR. AND MRS. SELLA ARE WELL AND FAVORABLY KNOWN TO THE EMBASSY. THEY KNOW AMERICA AND AMERICANS WELL AND SHOULD BE ABLE TO CONTRIBUTE TOWARD IMPROVING RELATIONS BETWEEN THE ISRAELI EMBASSY AND THE AMERICAN LABOR MOVEMENT AS WELL AS WITH OFFICERS IN STATE AND LABOR DEALING WITH INTERNATIONAL LABOR AFFAIRS.

4. ACCORDING TO HISTADRUT SOURCES, THE FUTURE SELECTION OF LABOR ATTACHES MAY BECOME INCREASINGLY COMPLICATED. FOR INSTANCE, THE HISTADRUT HAS ALREADY REFUSED TO PROVIDE A CANDIDATE FOR THE VACANT LABOR ATTACHE SLOT IN LONDON. HISTADRUT SECRETARY GENERAL MESHEL HAS DECIDED INSTEAD TO SEND A RESIDENT HISTADRUT REPRESENTATIVE TO LONDON WITH NO LINKS TO THE EMBASSY. MESHEL ACTED AFTER HAVING BEEN INFORMED THAT THE TUC WAS NO LONGER WILLING TO COOPERATE WITH A LABOR ATTACHE REPRESENTING THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT. REPORTEDLY, FORMER FOREIGN MINISTER YIGAL ALLON TRIED TO SPONSOR A CANDIDATE FOR THE LABOR ATTACHE JOB IN
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LONDON, BUT THE MFA SELECTION BOARD TURNED HIM DOWN AS "UNSUITABLE." THERE ARE NOW RUMORS THAT SEVERAL LIKUD MEMBERS WITH TRADE UNION CONNECTIONS ARE DEMANDING THAT THEY BE GIVEN LABOR ATTACHE ASSIGNMENTS ON THE BASIS OF POLITICAL PATRONAGE. HOWEVER, EVEN IF THE GOVERNMENT WERE TO YIELD TO THESE DEMANDS, THE RECEPTION OF THESE ATTACHES IN MOST COUNTRIES WERE THE HISTADRUT CONTINUES TO ENJOY FATHERLY RELATIONS WOULD AT BEST BE DIFFICULT. MESHEL MAY DISCUSS THIS MATTER WITH LEN MURRAY WHEN HE ATTENDS THE TUC CONGRESS IN SEPTEMBER. LEWIS

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